

KL to discuss panel details with S'pore

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PUTRAJAYA: Malaysia hopes to discuss with Singapore soon details on the setting up of the independent panel of experts to monitor reclamation work by the republic in the Straits of Johor.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said the panel needed to be set up fast as the two countries had been given only a year to do it by the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

ITLOS, which sat in Hamburg, Germany, to hear Malaysia's objection to the reclamation works, had on Wednesday ordered the two parties to co-operate and consult each other in establishing a group of independent experts and a mechanism for the exchange of information on the reclamation.

Syed Hamid said the two sides had not talked about the matter as ITLOS' preliminary decision was handed down only a few days ago.

He said this yesterday when asked whether Malaysia had approach Singapore to discuss the setting up of the panel.

"The experts are not plucked from the sky, we must ensure that both parties are satisfied.

"We are trying to find a solution that will provide for a win-win situation, both parties must benefit. This is for our future generations," he said after opening the International Media Centre at the Putrajaya Convention Centre.

"On top of that, there is a mechanism for regular exchange of information between the two countries, so now we have to sit down with Singapore to work out the details," he said.

On media reports that both countries had claimed victory in the judgment made by ITLOS, Syed Hamid said the issue was not about scoring points.

"This is not football. It is not a question of success or about scoring points, but it is a question of ensuring that the environment and ecology in the area are not damaged," he said.

He said it was sad that Malaysia had go to the court to get Singapore to co-operate in sharing information on the reclamation work.

"The bottom line is we are trying to

find a solution, we are not trying to find enemies," he said.

Singapore had carried out reclamation work involving 5,214ha of sea and the project is expected to be completed by 2010.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that Wisma Putra would decide on the candidates to sit on the independent panel as soon as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Summit concluded.

He said Wisma Putra had been instructed to look into the matter and sort out the details soon.

"I know Wisma Putra is busy with the OIC now," he said after launching a book on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad entitled *22 years 22 voices*.

Umno Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein said Singapore's non-compromising attitude would not help bilateral ties and would affect future generations.

He said that ITLOS' unanimous decision to direct Singapore and Malaysia to co-operate and consult in establishing a group of independent experts with terms of reference agreed upon by both sides was a good sign.